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ABSTRACT

The problem of determining the nature of this special form-class is seen in historical, linguistic perspective. A syntactic definition of predicatives as a word class with five types of morphological variation is included. The establishment of a word class or subclass on such a syntactic basis is suggested. (RL)

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THE PROBLEM OF PREDICATIVES IN RUSSIAN

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In Soviet linguistic circles there has been in recent years much bitter controversy about the establishment of a special form-class for so-called predicatives.[1] The history of this dispute goes back to 1928, when the linguist L. V. Ščerba cautiously suggested that uninflected words appearing only in the predicate be assigned to a special word-class, to be called in Russian kategorija sostojanija, literally the "category of state."[2] This term was selected since many of the words under discussion denoted a so-called state-of-being. Recently the term predicatives has come into use to represent words of this class, and for the sake of simplicity this term will be used here. Ščerba included not only impersonal predicate adverbs of the type Pozdno 'It is late,' but also short predicate adjectives, as in Ja gotov 'I am ready.'

Ščerba's suggestion was firmly supported by the Marrist school of linguistics, which always took syntax and not morphology as the proper basis of grammatical analysis. Such was, for example, the viewpoint of the leading spokesman of the Marrist camp, I. I. Meščaninov, in his book on the parts of speech.[3]

The leading non-Marrist grammarian of Russian, V. V. Vinogradov, seemed also to be in favor of a category of predicatives and considered it to be a full part of speech, in his Russkij jazyk.[4] However, in the new Academy Grammatika, edited by Vinogradov, he reversed his position and set up no separate category.[5] In Volume I (on Phonetics and Morphology) it is briefly mentioned twice, in the discussion of adverbs. In Volume II (on Syntax) no mention at all is made of the category. Words of the type pozdno are considered adverbs.

At present, two opposing views exist regarding this question. One group is for the setting up of a class of

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predicatives in line with the Ščerba tradition. The opponents of this have two main arguments: (1) no historical study has been made which would justify the recognition of a new word-class; and (2) predicatives have no special morphological features.

The divergent viewpoints were presented at a discussion on the parts of speech held at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1954.[6] In addition, three articles were published on this subject in the periodical Voprosy jazykoznanija in 1955. The linguists N. S. Pospelov and A. V. Isačenko declared themselves in favor of predicatives.[7] A. B. Šapiro defended the opposing viewpoint, basing his arguments mainly on the Formalist position of the Fortunatov school.[8]

After this brief review of the controversy, the following approach might be suggested. In modern grammatical analysis word-classes are set up, whenever possible, on the basis of inflection. With uninflected words, however, syntactic criteria must be used.[9] Since the words under discussion here are uninflected, we might define them as follows: A predicative in Russian is an uninflected word that regularly constitutes a complete utterance when standing alone, i.e., when preceded and followed by silence. Its intonational patterns are similar to those of longer sentence types. For example: Žarko 'It is hot'; Žarko? 'Is it hot?'; Žal' 'It is a shame'; Prijatno 'It is pleasant'; etc.

Such utterances have present-tense meaning. The very absence of the copula indicates the present.[10] The auxiliary verb bylo 'was' (always with neuter agreement) and budet 'will be' are used to form the past and future tenses: Žarko bylo 'It was hot'; Žarko budet 'It will be hot.' The particle by marks the conditional: Bylo by žarko 'It would be hot.' Occasionally, a verb of the type stanovit'sja 'to become' is used as the auxiliary in any of the three tenses: Stanovitsja žarko 'It is becoming hot'; Stalo žarko 'It became hot.' These last two sentences illustrate clearly the uninflected character of predicatives.[11] Compare the following sentence with a predicate adjective in the instrumental after stanovit'sja: Pogoda stanovitsja žarkoj 'The weather is becoming hot.'

Predicative sentences are impersonal: they have no subject. Compare: Èto ploxo 'This [i.e., something definite] is bad,' and Ploxo 'Things (in general) are bad.'

Predicative utterances should be considered a

full-sentence type in Russian.[12] They stand apart from minor sentence types such as answers, exclamations, and namings. In certain respects they are similar in structure to one-word nominal sentences. Compare Šumno 'It is noisy,' and Šum 'There is noise.'

On the basis of our definition we do not include short predicate adjectives in our word-class, as practically all Soviet linguists do.[13] Short predicate adjectives occur in an entirely different set of environments. They do not stand alone, i.e., they are used with a subject. Furthermore, short predicate adjectives are inflected for gender and number, and therefore should not be included in any class of uninflected words. To be sure, the homophony of many short neuter predicative adjectives and predicatives has led certain grammarians to look on both as identical.[14] A. M. Peškovskij struggled hard to differentiate between the two in infinitive-predicative constructions but did not come to clear-cut results.[15] Vinogradov points out that certain predicatives are morphologically different from short neuter predicate adjective forms in having a distinctive stress: ból'no and bol'nó, vol'nó and vól'no, pólno and polnó, etc.[16]

It is obvious that adverbs have entirely different environments than predicatives and make up a separate part of speech. Compare the following two sentences: On žarko sporil "He was arguing heatedly,' containing the adverb žarko, and Žarko 'It is hot,' consisting of the predicative. To be sure, the morphological similarity between adverbs in -o and most predicatives is so consistent that the recognition of the latter as a subclass of the former would undoubtedly appear more acceptable to many who read this paper. Whether an independent word-class (part of speech) or a subclass is recognized, is not the essential question here. What should be established is the special syntactic role of predicatives.

Predicative utterances, like most other major sentence types, can be expanded by dative or accusative objects, adverbial intensifiers, infinitives, negative and interrogative particles, and time and place modifiers. Numerous illustrations of these are provided in existing grammars of Russian, and, therefore, only two examples are given here: (1) Nam bylo očen' prijatno otdyxat' doma 'We found it very pleasant to rest at home'; (2) Ne bylo li žarko včera? 'Wasn't it hot yesterday?'

Morphologically, predicatives are of five main types.

(1) Those which are homophonous with adverbs derived from adjectives. The ending is usually spelt -o: Udobno 'It is comfortable.' The corresponding adjective is udobnyj 'comfortable.' Type 1 is the most numerous.

(2) Those which have the same ending as in (1), but which correspond to no adjective: Nado 'It is necessary'; Možno 'One may.'

(3) Comparative forms in -e: Udobnee 'It is more comfortable.'

(4) Past passive participles: Osveščeno 'It is lit up.'

(5) Those with noun endings: Žal' 'It is a shame'; Pora 'It is time.' As already mentioned, the neuter form bylo is used for the past tense of all predicatives. Thus, the normal agreement would be: Pora bylo spat' 'It was time to sleep'; Mne len' bylo zanimat'sja 'I felt too lazy to study'; Emu oxota bylo guljat' 'He felt like walking.' Occasionally, words of this type may waver in usage between predicative and noun. Vinogradov gives several examples of such parallel forms: pora bylo and pora byla, len' bylo and len' byla, oxota bylo and oxota byla.[17]

The recognition of predicatives as a separate word-class or subclass is an necessary in lexicography as in the description of the syntax. In the 1940 Ušakov Slovar', which is the most complete dictionary of modern Russian available, the treatment of predicatives, especially of those ending in -o, is inconsistent and incomplete. Although numerous predicatives are indicated, usually by examples given under the definition of the corresponding adjective or adverb form, many other predicatives are not given at all. The following illustrations from Ušakov will demonstrate this inconsistent treatment: Rano 'It is early' is given but Pozdno 'It is late' is omitted; Udobno 'It is comfortable' is given, but Ujutno 'It is cozy' is omitted. Other typical omissions are: Čudno 'It is marvelous'; Sumračno 'It is overcast'; Radostno 'It is cheerful'; etc. The situation in the abridged Ožegov Slovar' of 1952 is worse. The very large Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo jazyka, now being compiled, may give a somewhat better treatment.

Such omissions as listed above are most misleading, since no morphological or semantic criteria for determining just which adjectives and adverbs do possess corresponding predicative forms have been worked out. A newcomer to

Russian consulting any presently available dictionary might react in two ways. Firstly, if a predicative is not indicated, he would perhaps assume that it does not exist. This assumption is incorrect, as the examples given above demonstrate. Secondly, if he were to become aware of any of the omissions already described, he might infer that all adjectives with an adverb in -o have a corresponding predicative. This is also untrue, since as Šapiro has pointed out, there do exist such adjectives which have no corresponding predicatives.[18] Examples would be: gordyj 'proud,' slučajnyj 'unexpected,' zlobnyj 'spiteful,' predikativnyj 'predicative,' etc.

We may conclude with the following. The establishment of a word-class or subclass (of adverbs) on a syntactic basis is suggested. Detailed investigations of this word-class in modern Russian are necessary. Such investigations might answer the following questions.

(1) Just which predicatives do exist in Russian?

(2) Can any valid semantic generalizations be made concerning predicatives?

(3) Which predicatives may or may not be used with infinitives and/or objects, and which usually are?

(4) Where do predicative utterances fit in an overall scheme of Russian sentence types?

The answers to these questions would be a significant contribution to any attempt at a full description of Russian syntax and lexicon.

Notes

1. A version of this paper was read at the 1956 summer meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in Ann Arbor.

2. "O častjax reči v russkom jazyke," Russkaja reč', II (1928), 17.

3. Členy predloženija i časti reči (Moskva-Len., 1945), p. 270. See also A. V. Isačenko, "Morphologie, syntaxe, et phraséologie," Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure, VII (1948).

4. (Moskva-Leningrad, 1947), pp. 42-44, and 399-421.

5. Grammatika russkogo jazyka (Moskva, 1953), Vol. I; Vol. II was published in 1954 in two parts.

6. Voprosy jazykoznanija, 1955, No. 1, pp. 162-166.

7. N. S. Pospelov, "V zaščitu kategorii sostojanija," Vop. jaz., 1955, No. 2, pp. 55-65; A. V. Isačenko, "O kategorii sostojanija v slavjanskix jazykax," Vop. jaz., 1955, No. 6, pp. 48-65.

8. A. B. Šapiro, "Est' li v russkom jazyke kategorija sostojanija kak čast' reči?" Vop. jaz., 1955, No. 2, pp. 42-54. Šapiro's viewpoint was supported in an article received after this paper was written: F. Travniček, "Zametki o 'kategorii sostojanija,'" Vop. jaz., 1956, No. 3, pp. 46-53. Travniček concentrates his attack on the semantic classification of predicatives attempted by E. M. Galkina-Fedoruk in Sovremennyj russkij jazyk, ed. V. V. Vinogradov (Moskva, 1952), I, 394-404.

9. See L. Bloomfield, Language (New York, 1933), pp. 184-206; B. Bloch and G. L. Trager, Outline of Linguistic Analysis (Baltimore, 1942), pp. 60-61; C. C. Fries, The Structure of English (New York, 1952), pp. 65-141; O. Jesperson, The Philosophy of Grammar (London-New York, 1924), pp. 60-61.

10. We can speak here of a zero morpheme of tense. Pospelov (p. 56) considers the tense and mood markers (zero, bylo, budet, by) to be the morphological features of predicatives.

11. Occasionally, where an infinitive is apparently felt to function as the subject, the instrumental neuter adjective is used instead of a predicative: Dolgo dumat' kazalos' Bel'tovu smešnym "Bel'tov thought it ridiculous to reflect for a long time' (Gercen).

12. Bloomfield indicates this in his Language, p. 174.

13. See, for example, Vinogradov, Rus. jaz., pp. 402-403; Isačenko, "O kat.," p. 63.

14. For example, G. Gunnarsson, La Décadence de l'adjectif nominal dans les langues slaves (Paris-Stockholm, 1931), p. 87.

15. A. M. Peškovskij, Russkij sintaksis v naučnom osveščenii (Moskva, 1920), pp. 360-363.

16. Rus. jaz., p. 408.

17. Ibid., pp. 417-418. See also the Ušakov Slovar', entries oxota and neoxota.

18. Šapiro, p. 54.

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